

# you're my best friend, i'll love you forever by fljghtlessbirds

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** M/M

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Dustin Henderson, Eleven | Jane Hopper, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington, Will Byers

**Relationships:** Will Byers & Mike Wheeler, Will Byers/Mike Wheeler

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**Summary:**

will byers had always known he had more than platonic feelings for his best friend, mike wheeler. he just didn't know everyone else knew, too.

## 1. one

### Notes for the Chapter:

title based on the song 'you get me so high' by the neighbourhood.  
takes place 2 years after season 2 (so 1986),  
everything is canon compliant.

will byers was pacing back and forth in his tiny living room, waiting patiently for his mom to get home. she was working overtime at the retail store she was employed at, desperately trying to earn a promotion that everyone in their small town knew she deserved. the sound of a lock disengaging and a doorknob turning interrupted will's nervous movements, and his heart stopped. the crushing reality of coming out to his mother and brother finally kicked in, and will finally realized just how scared he was. the demogorgon and the mind flayer suddenly seemed like nothing compared to this.

confusion and worry were painted on his mother's face as she walked in, a bag full of chinese takeout for dinner in one of her hands, keys in the other. "will, baby, what's wrong?" she always knew right away something was bothering her son.

will chuckled and continued pacing, only this time he started to fiddle with his fingers. "when does jonathan get home?"

joyce walked into the kitchen that was conjoined to the living room, setting the food down on the table and returning back to will in record time. "not until eight. jim won't be home until way late. why?" joyce always suspected the worst whenever will was upset. that that thing was back, or worse.

will didn't really care about hopper or eleven. he just wanted to tell his mom and jonathan for now. "i just want to tell you guys something, that's all," will paused for a moment to collect his thoughts. joyce could see the gears turning in his head; he was having a war with his mind about whatever he wanted to say. "it can wait until tomorrow." he smiled sheepishly, shrugging off his mom and walking towards the kitchen. "what's for dinner?"

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the next day, will was pacing once again. this time, though, it was outside of the school where steve harrington always picked them up opposed to his living room. after halloween of 1984, steve took it upon himself to look after the kids. no one knew why, and no one bothered asking because they loved him too much to question it. steve helped them out with everything; girls, what to wear, hair, music. he had gotten used to the kids asking him for advice, but today will was going to ask something he never would have imagined.

steve was surprised to see will alone, he almost never went without his groups of friends. his height and size always got to the best of him and he was an easy target for bullies. he quickly parked his shitty car and jogged over to will, worry etched onto his mole covered face. "what's wrong, shortstuff?"

will only chuckled at the nickname. over the years he's grown used to the stupid names everyone started calling him when he was the only one who hasn't hit his growth spurt yet. mike is almost six foot while poor will is stuck at 5'2". "can we talk?"

steve nodded quickly and led him to one of the benches that was in the courtyard of the high school. it was covered in leaves, a telltale sign that summer was indeed long gone and fall was here. will brushed them off and they sat down. "where are the others?" steve knew the answer to his previous question; will was alone because he needed help with something, and they needed to talk privately. the schoolgrounds were mostly empty with the exception of a few kids.

"they went down to the middle school to talk to mr. clarke about something." will's eyes shifted to the high schoolers that were scattered around them, scanning to see if anyone was a possible threat.

"will," steve put his hand on the knee that was bouncing furiously out of anxiety, and will stopped immediately. "you're okay. spill. what is wrong with you?"

heat couldn't help but burst onto will's cheeks. he's had a tiny crush on steve harrington since the first day he saw him at mike's house

three years ago. he was just so good looking, will couldn't help but feel nervous and flustered around him. and if steve harrington was demanding him to spill, will byers was certainly going to *spill*. "how did you know you liked boys?"

steve nearly choked on his own spit. that was not what he was expecting. it was pretty obvious will liked boys. the longing glances at mike when will thought he wasn't looking, or the goodbye hugs that always lasted too long. it was no secret will had a huge crush on mike, will only thought it was. but steve knew that's not the answer will was looking for. he didn't want steve to say that he knew all along, or that it was obvious. he wanted to be accepted and supported, and most of all he wanted to know that it was okay.

and it was no secret that steve harrington wasn't straight. the whole tiny town of hawkins knew that steve was a raging bisexual. steve was certain that no one even knew what bisexuality meant, but it still didn't stop him from coming out. he came out to his dad, and unsurprisingly, he got kicked out from his house. for a while he was living out of his car until he found a shabby apartment towards the rundown area of hawkins. he went to a college that was a half an hour drive south, majoring in business. that was definitely not what steve wanted to do with his life, but he figured it was one of the ways to make his father hate him less.

and of course, there was the permanent soft spot steve had for will. it was mostly because of the fact that he was in love with his older brother, but also due to the fact he sees himself in will. shitty father, sexuality issues, being in love with your best friend. the list goes on and on.

so, steve knew that he had to help will as much as he could. "i think i always knew, but it wasn't until i was your age that i really figured out i liked boys the same way i liked girls. i didn't put a label on it until i saw return of the jedi and i realized i was attracted to leia in her slave bikini. then i realized i was slightly more attracted to han solo." steve paused to laugh, and will joined in a second later.

will's mouth opened and shut a few times, struggling to find the right words. "how did you know you were in love with nancy?" his voice was soft and curious, and barely came out above a whisper.

steve's heart dropped at the mention of nancy's name. that was a mess he had spent two years trying to forget. it was painful to watch the girl you loved pine after another guy, and it was even more painful for him to also slowly fall in love with jonathan byers. "every time i saw her, thought of her, or talked to her, as cliché as it sounds, i got butterflies. spending time with her made my whole week. you can talk about anything and everything without it being awkward, and you trust each other with your lives. she was on my mind all the time, i even saw myself having a future with her at one point. and through no matter what, even being kidnapped by a weird flower looking shadow monster thing," steve stopped to lock eyes with will. "they will stick by you and love you right back."

will nodded slowly, regaining his composure after the weight of all of steve's words piled up on him like a bed of rocks. his chest was heavy, and his breathing was uneven. his eyes were stinging and tears were beginning to fall. his voice cracked as he croaked out, "i think i'm in love with mike."

## 2. two

the car ride home was the worst one will had ever experienced. he just wanted to be left alone with his thoughts and figure out how he was going to tell his family that he was gay. but, irritating voices belonging to dustin and lucas were ringing in his ears instead. they were arguing about whether or not the events of back to the future could possibly happen in 2015, or if it was all too unrealistic. lucas was obviously being logical and was fighting back that floating hoverboards were never going to happen, and dustin was desperately grasping at straws saying anything is possible thirty years from now, with scientific advancements and all. mike was watching by idly, throwing in little comments here and there. he mostly just laughed and never really took a side. steve was clearly agitated. his eyes were focusing hard on the road, making sure to not be distracted by this ridiculous argument. his brow was furrowed in concentration, but he would occasionally shift his gaze to his rearview mirror to see how will was doing. he smirked when he saw that will was sandwiched between mike and dustin, and the look on his face was priceless. lucas was in the front seat but his body was turned to face dustin, arms flailing as he told dustin he was an idiot multiple times. will's cheeks were still flushed from his conversation with steve, but moreso at the close proximity of mike. mike's long legs took up most of the backseat, and dustin's thicker thighs were causing will to be pushed into mike's left side. if will hadn't known any better, he would have thought dustin was purposely pushing him into mike. but that's insane, right?

steve dropped lucas, mike, and dustin off at their houses and will finally felt like he could breathe. he lived the farthest away so he was always last to get home, and it was one of the reasons he and steve had the close relationship they had. they bonded over the fifteen minute drives they shared over the past two years, talking about everything and nothing at the same time. but this time it was dead quiet. it was a comfortable silence rather than the thick, loud conversation that was filling the tiny car before. will was hoping steve would never break it, but of course he did. his shoulders tensed when he saw that steve's mouth was left agape, a clear sign he was trying to figure out what to say.

“hey, bud, you okay?” steve finally asked. it wasn’t condescending or pitiful, but genuine and out of worry.

will immediately relaxed. he didn’t know why he was worried. steve never pushed the limits and everyone knew he was a huge softie despite the rude, tough guy demeanor he put up around him like walls. “yeah, just nervous.” he answered honestly. he knew his mom wouldn’t drop the conversation he had with her yesterday, and will was actually scared of what was waiting for him at home. but luckily steve gave him enough confidence to attempt to tell her.

steve only nodded, not wanting to say something wrong. he eventually pulled up to will’s long rock littered driveway. hopper’s police truck, joyce’s green car, and jonathan’s shitty, rusted one were all parked next to each other and steve could see the color drain from will’s face at the sight.

he parked his car, and turned his body to somewhat face will. “hey, it’s okay. the conversation from yesterday probably just freaked them out.” steve reassured.

will nodded halfheartedly. he knew he was right but it still made the situation a lot more nerve wracking that hopper was here now. “thanks for the ride, and y’know... everything else.” he grabbed his backpack that was in between his legs. before he climbed out of the backseat, he put his body in between the passenger and driver’s seat and gave steve a really awkward hug. his tiny arms barely reached around steve’s neck, but it was the thought that counts. will bid him goodbye and gave a little wave, and made his way towards his front door where his impending doom lay. steve waited for a minute before tearing out of their driveway and going home, as if will was going to run out screaming and crying and beg steve to come inside with him to help him out.

will slowly opened his wooden front door, a loud creak emitting from it as he did so. three pairs of eyes met him as he walked in, staring at him intently as if he was a bomb that was going to blow up any second now. joyce, hopper, and jonathan were all sitting at the dining table. a pack of camels were on the table, and an ashtray sat in the middle. it was nearly overflowing with cigarette butts, no doubt left from his mom. will made eye contact with hopper and

outright he asked, “are you having episodes again?”

will sighed loudly, strode as fast as his short legs could take him and plopped down in the fourth seat of the dining table. he hated that he made them worry about him when in reality it was something as dumb and petty as his sexuality. “no, it’s nothing serious like that,” their stern, concerned faces didn’t change and will groaned softly out of frustration. “i promise.”

“then what were you going to tell mom last night?” jonathan asked.

will frowned and nervously bit his lip. he hadn’t really thought out what exactly he was going to say. “sweetie, you can talk to us about anything, okay?” joyce put her hands on his, and rubbed them softly. the wedding band on her finger was cold and it gave will goosebumps at the touch.

“yeah, kid, we’re here for you.” hopper nodded and leaned forward, his elbows on the table and hands clasped together, tucked underneath his jaw.

“is el here?” will’s gaze was on their conjoined fingers, afraid to look at anything else.

joyce and hopper shared a quick glance. will had been uncharacteristically cold to eleven since she moved in with the byers, and no one knew why. will loved everyone and never treated them poorly, but he and el never clicked. joyce and hopper had just assumed it was because they were siblings now and by law they had to hate each other, but really it was because will was jealous. mike and eleven spent so much time together, more time than mike and will do now. it didn’t help that will was purposely distancing himself from mike either; his feelings were becoming a painful reality and it hurt to be around mike. will looked at michael wheeler like he put the stars in the sky, but michael wheeler didn’t look at him the same way. he saw will as a brother and a best friend, but mike looked at jane hopper the way will wished he would look at him. some nights his dreams were filled of the boy he couldn’t have. first kisses that they would never share, will drawing beautiful portraits of mike as they spent lazy afternoons together, cuddling and hand holding, reading comic books and drowning each other in compliments until



they were beet red in embarrassment. the reality that none of this was going to happen because he was in love with someone else, a *girl*, crushed him. it was heartbreaking and too much for will to handle. he would wake up with a cold sweat formed on his forehead, only to roll over and cry himself back to sleep.

“no, jane is at mike’s.” hopper said dryly.

“okay,” will replied. “i... i’m...” he frowned again, not finding the right words. “gay.” it took him a solid minute to finally finish his sentence, but his family was so patient and caring that it didn’t even feel like a second.

joyce’s expression softened immediately, and she squeezed will’s hand even tighter. “oh, sweetie,” she smiled at her son, just as she always did, like he was her whole world. “you know we accept you, right? nothing could ever change our love for you.”

will beamed, and chuckled out of relief. “i know. it’s just...dad.”

jonathan looked really pissed. “fuck dad, will,” joyce slapped his arm at the use of his harsh language, but he only rolled his eyes. “he had no right to say those things to you. you shouldn’t be treated any differently because you like boys. who gives a shit?”

hopper nodded in agreement. “and if anyone gives you shit, you call me and i will personally beat their ass up.”

tears of joy formed in will’s eyes, and before he knew it he was being hugged by everyone.

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jane came home at around six. mike had walked her home, despite the very long distance from his house. another hurtful pang of jealousy hit will’s heart when he heard mike’s voice echo throughout his house, but he stayed in his room working on a drawing instead of saying hi to him. he heard jane’s door close, and he forced himself to get up and knock on her door.

“yes?” her muffled voice said through the wooden paneling.

“can i come in?”

“yeah.” he twisted the knob, and saw jane sitting on her bed, painting her nails. she rarely went by el or eleven anymore, she hated it. it reminded her of dr. brenner and the traumatic experiences that came out of hawkins lab. everyone understood, but it was hard to not call her el when they were used to doing it for so long. jane gets really tense and upset when anyone does, with the exception of mike. she grew her hair out to a little past her shoulders; it was dark brown and insanely curly. max taught her how to braid her hair and showed her the art that is black nail polish. jane can’t believe she ever hated max, the two are inseparable and spend hours at the arcade together when they aren’t with their boyfriends. max even taught her how to skateboard.

“can i sit?” she nodded, and will complied. “you weren’t here when i told everyone else, but, i’m... i’m gay.” he sighed when he finished his sentence. yet another burden lifted off his shoulders. only five other people left to tell.

jane only frowned at him. “what is gay?”

will couldn’t help but laugh out loud. jane started going to school and grew an extensive vocabulary, but apparently ‘gay’ wasn’t one of the new words she learned. “it means i like boys instead of girls.”

“oh, okay. that’s cool.” she smiled warmly, and patted him on the shoulder, careful not to get her wet, thickly painted black nails on his shirt.

“cool.”

### 3. three

#### Notes for the Chapter:

sorry it took me so long to post this short ass sucky  
chap omg  
i had really bad writers block ;( hopefully i'll have  
chaps out weekly again

it was friday night, and will and his friends were having their weekly dungeons and dragons session in mike's basement. the board game was in the center of the table, and the kids were sitting in their close knit circle screaming at each other. much to his dismay, mike had to go upstairs and help nancy with the dishes from dinner. he whined to his mom about how holly can help, despite her being only six years old. karen wheeler gave her son the most unamused look he had ever seen, and mike knowingly sighed and started going up the stairs, taking them two at a time.

he yelled something incoherent from the top, turning the doorknob and slamming the door behind him. it was a really intense part of gameplay, but after debating for a minute they ultimately decided against playing without their paladin.

will looked to his left, where jane and max were deep in a conversation about who knows what. they were never really into d&d, but they played anyways to spend time with their friends and boyfriends. he then looked to his right, where dustin and lucas were arguing about playing without mike. dustin was the only one who wanted to keep playing without him, and lucas clearly thought that was idiotic. and will was left smushed between them alone with his thoughts, fidgeting awkwardly with his fingers.

he had grown used to this life as his friends grew taller, broader, and more attractive. lucas and mike of course had their girlfriends and for a while he had dustin to third wheel with, but just as nancy predicted dustin hit puberty the hardest. he lost the baby fat that stayed in his face, hollowing out his face and defining his jawline and cheekbones. with tips from steve he tamed his wild mane that he called hair, and the chicks digged it. dustin's quick wit and annoyingly good sense of

humor gained him the class clown title and everyone liked him, especially stacey. they've been dating for a month.

a few girls had shown interest in will, and will attempted to feel the same way that they did while he was still trying to figure out his sexuality. hearing what troy had said to him all the time, or what he saw on the news, what his own father called him, how so many people in hawkins reacted about steve; these things had all scared him shitless of what would happen if he came out, and he hated it. he hated himself. he tried so desperately to be straight his entire life, but as he and mike grew closer and closer and his non platonic feelings grew deeper and deeper, he knew he couldn't pretend anymore.

he didn't mind being alone, in fact he loved it. he's at his greatest when he's isolated from other people and he enjoys it, but there's something about watching the people he loved —jonathan, mike, lucas, dustin, his mom—get into relationships and see how happy they are that made him feel so *lonely*. perhaps it was because he knows how difficult it's going to be to find a boyfriend in their small and somewhat traditional town, so he can't feel or relate to what his friends are experiencing at the moment. or maybe it was because no one knows what it was like to be trapped in the upside down, hearing the desperate cries of his friends and family as they looked for him, not being able to respond or do anything about it in fear of the demogorgon finding him. jane could somewhat understand; she had been to that awful place, and she found barbara's lifeless body, but she wasn't *stuck* there. and jane certainly hadn't been possessed by the mind flayer. will had no control over what he did and said, powerless as he sent those men to their doom in the hive's hub. he always thinks about how many people who worked in the lab died, an overwhelming weight on his mind and chest. how he wanted to tell mike so badly that he loved him as he retold the story of how they first met, in explicit detail that he thought mike didn't remember, and how much it meant to him that he *did* remember. he wanted to scream those three words until his throat was raw and bleeding. will saw the tears pouring out of his mom's, jonathan, and mike's eyes and he so terribly wanted to tell them that he was there and warn them about everything that was going to come. but he couldn't. and what hurt him most of all was none of them could understand the pain of loving your best friend while he's in love with

someone else.

his train of thought was interrupted by mike's voice yelling jane's name to come upstairs. she gave them all an apologetic look, smiling sheepishly as she climbed the stairs. a pang of jealousy hit will's heart. with jane gone, his friends suddenly become acutely aware of his presence, and shifted their attention towards him. "so, will, i saw that you almost came close to beating my high score on dig dug." max said, a smug smile planted on her lips. it's been two years and they still haven't beaten her.

will let out a short, fake laugh and nodded. max frowned, and the other three shared a knowing glare with each other. "what's wrong?" lucas asked.

"i was just thinking, that's all." his eyes were focused on his hands, trying to look at anything but his friends as tears started to form.

"what about?" dustin asked. will sniffled and let out a harsh laugh of defeat as tears dripped off of his face, landing in his lap. "woah, hey, why are you crying?"

"i'm gay," will said, cutting to the chase this time instead of beating around the bush like he did with his family. "and not only that, but i'm in love with mike." his voice was no louder than a whisper, afraid that mike or jane would hear.

the thick silence that filled the air was deafening and unbearable. lucas was the first to speak. "is that why you've been so distant?"

will nodded, thinking back to the past month or so. he made up terrible excuses to get out of so many sleepovers and arcade sessions he was invited to. he still came to their d&d campaigns, but as soon as their games ended he was out of mike's house as quick as possible. "it always hurt seeing them together. i figured it was because i thought he was replacing me or whatever, but i knew that wasn't true. i didn't realize i loved him until i told steve and he helped me understand."

"i'm sorry, will. we love you all the same, dude. nothing will ever change that." dustin said. "and it gets easier. the pining part, not the

gay part. i wouldn't know about the gay part. but i'm sure that gets easier, too."

"shut up, asshole," lucas said, smacking dustin on the back of his head. will laughed at his dumb friends, feeling happy that he was accepted and that nothing is going to change. "but we're always here for you. and we'll cover for you if you don't want to be around them, okay? we understand."

max nodded. "and if you ever wanna talk, just call us. please."

will beamed at his friends at their support, and they all stood up and wrapped their arms around him. it was an awkward hug with the way will was sitting, but they didn't really care. "just so you know, i think it's going to be awhile before i tell mike," will said into a shoulder. he didn't know who it belonged to; maybe it was lucas'. "i'm not ready. i don't want him thinking i like him or that i'm a freak just because i'm gay." he didn't actually admit that out loud until now; he was too afraid to because it would mean the moronic idea could possibly come true.

"take your time, buddy," dustin said, breaking the hug. with a foreign seriousness in his eyes, he went on. "mike may be a douche sometimes, but he would never do that to you." they heard the door open and quickly scrambled back to their seats, will wiping furiously underneath his eyes to get rid of any evidence that he had been crying, and dustin trying to look as normal as he could.

mike gave them a confused look, but then just shrugged it off with a scoff and took his seat at the head of the table.

"your turn, will." he said this with a harsh tone, his eyes staring hardy at the game board in front of them, a sign that his mood shifted to something else. dustin shared a quick look with will, before handing him the dice.

## 4. four

### Notes for the Chapter:

happy pride !!

the gay energy is flowing thru me and i decided to  
come back to this v gay fic

only took me 7 months but here i am

some homophobic slurs in this one boys :(

proceed w/ caution <3

the next few weeks, will didn't have to come up with fake excuses every time he was invited to hang out with his friends, because he wasn't invited at all. mike had been ignoring everyone, including jane, since their last d&d campaign three weeks ago. will tried to not let it bother him, but the longer the silent treatment went on the angrier he got. at first, he was sad and confused, left wondering what he or anyone did wrong to make mike completely cut them off. he thought for a minute that it was because he and jane broke up, or there was trouble in paradise, but that theory was debunked the second he saw jane come home with a sad smile on her face. she told will, "mike is just going through some stuff."

and of course there was the looming thought that someone told mike that he was gay, and now mike hated everyone else for keeping it a secret, and he especially hated will because he was *a queer. a fairy. a faggot. a flamer.* mike couldn't stand the disgusting person he once called his best friend.

in school, will desperately wanted to ask anyone if they told mike. but if he was just being paranoid, he didn't want to risk having everyone hating him, so he kept quiet. it was eating him up inside.

will was gnawing on his bottom lip at the lunch table, staring at a garbage can in the distance. mike was standing near there, pinning a flyer up to a corkboard. it probably had something to do with av club. it took everything in him to not shift his eyes to the left to stare at mike, wishing he would just come over here and talk to him. lucas, who was sitting on his right, tapped him on the shoulder. "what's so captivating about that trash can, will?"

he stared back at lucas for a beat, eyes wide as he tried to swim out of his thoughts. “nothing, i was just...”

“you know that we didn’t tell him, right?” dustin said from his seat across from lucas.

“dude!”

“what?”

“i-i didn’t think—” will began, but lucas only cocked one of his eyebrows and that’s all it took for will to crumble. “fine. i just don’t get it. he’s clearly avoiding us, and we didn’t even do anything.” he said with a small pout on his lips.

“have you ever thought about how maybe that’s how mike has been feeling?” max said softly. lucas glared at her for a second, silently telling her ‘why did you just say that’ with only his eyes. “just being honest.” she mumbled, looking down at her food.

“fuck.” will said, a pool of guilt forming in his stomach.

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he was sitting in one of the chairs that resided in the av club’s classroom. the room itself was tucked away in the basement and hasn’t been used in years. will thinks it was an old supply closet for sports equipment, which would explain the dust and why it smells like dead feet. his leg was bouncing nervously, waiting for mike to walk through the door any second now. he figured this would be the only place mike would go. he hates being at home because his parents constantly argue, usually about getting a divorce. he only tolerates it if his friends are there to drown out the yelling. the arcade is lonely if you only go by yourself, will learned that the hard way, so that left the av club. behind him, there was a plaque dedicated to bob newby boring holes into his neck. after his “car accident,” hawkins high saw it fit to make an av club for the high school since he helped found the one at the middle school. it was hopper’s idea.

before will could get into his endless cycle of guilty bad thoughts, the sound of the door being pulled open snapped him back into reality.



mike scoffed when he saw will, and he would be lying if that didn't hurt him. "what do you want?" he said offhandedly as he fiddled with cords that ran out of one of the many radios. he was on the other side of the room, clearly trying to distance himself from will to prove his point.

will cleared his throat and sat up a little taller. if he was going to stand his ground to mike, who was testing his patience by the second, he needed to seem... bigger than usual. *as if that was what it takes to boost his confidence*, he thought. "i just wanted to talk, that's all."

another scoff earned from mike. "oh, so now you want to talk?" he kneeled down to get a better look at the wires, even though will knew there was nothing wrong with them.

will frowned. "w-what's that supposed to mean?" his false confidence was faltering, unsurprisingly. he crossed his arms over his chest.

all six feet of mike waltzed over to where will was sitting in one swift motion, and he was now towering over him with a deep scowl painted on his face. "seriously? when el and i left the basement on that saturday you and everyone else were huddled up whispering secrets like a bunch of little girls. it's bullshit!"

sounds of confusion spilt out of will's mouth. "that's what this is about? it was nothing... bad, mike." his voice got softer as he went on.

will's hesitation got a reaction out of mike that he couldn't place. "yeah? if it wasn't bad, tell me." he pulled up a chair, the metal legs scraping on the tiled floor as he did so, and sat down right in front of will. uncomfortably close, considering the topic of conversation.

"um..." his brain was going haywire, desperately trying to come up with an answer that was anything but the truth. he took a deep breath and made the mistake of making eye contact with mike. his complexion was stern, but his eyes were telling a different story; they were filled with worry and... sadness. "the reason why i couldn't tell you, and why i've been so distant and weird, is because it was about you." will finally said slowly, meticulously choosing his words.

a frown formed quickly on mike's brow, trying to understand what that meant. "i thought it was nothing bad?"

"it's not, really." will said, trying to reassure mike.

"then why couldn't you tell me?"

"because it's dumb!" will said with a chuckle. "i'm..." *gay. and in love with you.* "jealous. of you and jane."

realization settled over mike's face. "oh."

quick to explain himself, and hoping that he doesn't think any wrong ideas, will continues. "you're just always hanging out with her and we barely do anymore. i just felt kind of replaced, but i know that's dumb. i was being a dumbass."

mike nodded. "i'm sorry, will. i didn't know you felt that way. sorry for being a dick."

will smiled. "sorry for shutting you out. do you wanna have an impromptu d&d game later?"

"yeah, we're a little behind, huh? i'll meet up with you guys later at my house." mike smiled back.

will laughed, feeling more normal than he has in weeks.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

soz this was so short still going thru some writers block

## 5. five

### Notes for the Chapter:

to make up for my long absence here's a long one  
homophobic slurs in this one as well as mentions of  
ptsd and nightmares, along with mentions of blood  
(but not graphic)  
tread carefully.

halloween used to be will's favorite holiday. he and his best friends always matched costumes, dressing up as whatever nerdy interest the boys were hyper fixating over currently. his mom let him stay awake an hour later, and she loved sewing his costume. seeing will so excited and happy was a bonus. and of course the candy; what kid didn't love candy?

but that was before.

now he sees the mind flayer and the demogorgon in his dreams, in reality, everywhere he went. he sees the dead people he unknowingly killed. he sees bob. now he doesn't go out on halloween, doesn't even leave the house on the day of.

now, he wakes up, startled and limbs thrashing in the middle of the night. he was breathing heavily, and drenched in a cold sweat after yet another nightmare. halloween wasn't for another week and a half, but his ptsd was kicking in now. apparently his memories couldn't wait to torture him. halloween is just a haunting reminder of everything that he's been through; what he put everyone else through. his heart was racing, will sat up and rubbed at his sleepy eyes. he inhaled and exhaled deeply, trying to calm himself. slowly, with a disgusted look on his face, he removed his soaking wet blanket from his body and decided to grab a glass of water. his throat seemed scratchy and sore, meaning he was probably screaming bloody mary in his dreams. will sighed, throwing his bedspread and sheets onto the floor, and reached for his doorknob. opening his door revealed a worried looking joyce, wrapping her bathrobe around her shoulders.

"nightmare." he whispered, answering her question for her. he

shuffled his half asleep body down the hall into the kitchen, joyce trailing behind him.

she sat at the table while he fiddled around with getting a glass in the pitch black darkness, careful not to break anything. she started to bite one of her fingernails, but made herself stop. bad habit. slowly, she spoke. "wanna talk about it?" joyce knew better than to ask this, as it always produced the same answer, but she couldn't help herself. the nightmares were starting earlier than they usually do.

will made his way to the sink's tap. "i don't really remember much of it, just that i was back down there again." that was a lie. he always remembered his dreams, in excruciating detail nonetheless. he filled the glass to the rim and began gulping down the water.

"i'm sorry, honey. try and get some more sleep, okay?" will nodded, and walked over to her after setting his glass down in the sink. she stood up and they hugged, and joyce pressed just about a million kisses into his hair as best as she could. "i know i say this every day but god, you're getting tall."

will laughed. "love you, mom. g'night." he grabbed a blanket from the couch in the living room and made his way back to his room.

joyce slid back down into her seat, letting out a deep sigh as she did so. reaching into one of her bathrobe's pockets, she grabbed her trusty pack of camels and lit one between her teeth. seconds after hearing will's door latch, hopper came out of their bedroom and sat down next to joyce. she slid the pack across the table and he gratefully accepted. "what are we gonna do, hop? how can we help him move past this?" her small voice was filled with so much pain, and it broke hopper's heart.

"i don't know. i don't even know if there's anything we can do." he said softly, taking a deep puff from his cigarette.

"it's been three years. the boy has literally been to hell and back and he brought so much shit back with him. it's just not fair." her voice was growing in volume as she grew more frustrated, and breaking as it did so. hopper put a hand on her shoulder and rubbed it gently.

“he’s a strong kid, joyce. you know that better than anyone. he’ll get through it one day.” she nodded and let out a shaky breath, but not allowing tears to fall. she leaned into hopper’s shoulder, giving him a small hug.

“you’re right. i just feel so hopeless and i—” joyce shook her head to cut herself off. she took one final deep inhale from her cigarette, and then stubbed out her cigarette if not a little excessively. she leant up and kissed hopper’s cheek. “it’s late, let’s just go back to bed.”

in the other room, will scrambled away from the door that he was eavesdropping through and swan dived back into his bed. he pulled the blankets over his head and waited for his door to inevitably open, his mother checking in on him. a few seconds later, she did just that. joyce whispered “good night, will,” and then shut the door once more. will let out a small giggle as he noticed how hard his heart was beating. he rolled over, and started counting sheep to distract himself from thinking about what his mom and stepfather had said.

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in the morning, will had bags under his eyes, and he couldn’t stop yawning. he really hadn’t missed this. he sat at the table, waiting for joyce to finish making breakfast. hopper was reading the newspaper drinking his coffee, and jane was still in her room sleeping. part of the arrangement with dr. owens included that she couldn’t go to school, so joyce homeschools her for a few hours before going to work. jonathan lives on campus at purdue university, which is only an hour or so away from hawkins. they have a great photography program there and nancy enrolled there too. “how’d you sleep, will?” hopper asked, not looking up from the paper.

“fine. after my nightmare i was okay.” lie. he tossed and turned and slept for maybe an hour before his alarm went off at seven.

“your appointment with doc owens is at 3:30, you know. hop will take you while i work my shift at melvald’s.” joyce said over her shoulder as she stirred the scrambled eggs.

“yeah, i know.” will dreaded his sessions with dr. owens just as much as he did two years ago. but he needed to be evaluated, there’s no doubting that. suddenly, the honk of a car horn interrupted his

thoughts. will stood up and looked out the kitchen window. "it's steve."

"breakfast?" joyce asked, hand on her hip.

"i'll be fine, bye!" he grabbed the bagged lunch his mom had made him along with his bag and coat, and that was that. weirdly, no one else was in the car except for steve. will was usually the last to get picked up. "where is everyone?" he asked as he got in.

"well, seeing as you're my favorite, i have a little surprise for you, shortstuff." steve said, earning a laugh from will.

"really? dustin's gonna be pissed. what's the surprise?" steve was fishing around in the backseat.

"what dustin doesn't know won't hurt him. aha! got it!" he was holding a cassette tape in his hand. "it fell off the seat. you really need a better driveway." he handed it to will.

"a mixtape?" steve nodded.

"yup. now everyday, or at least monday through friday, we get to listen to your music."

will grinned. "awesome. how do you even know what music i like?"

"well, i may or may not have called jonathan. what are you waiting for, put it in!" will laughed again and did as steve said, and the first song that came on was venus by bananarama.

will began laughing even harder as he wheezed out, "oh my god, no! i can't believe jon told you i liked this song!"

steve laughed too as he pulled out of the driveway. "it's a good song!" he began singing loudly in a high pitched off-key voice as the first verse hit, "goddess on the mountain top, burning like a silver flame!" tears were forming in will's eyes. "the summit of beauty and love, and venus was her name! come on will, i know you know it!!"

in unison, and in equally annoying feminine voices, they sang, "she's got it! yeah, baby, she's got it!" the car pulled up to dustin's house

and steve honked the horn. "i'm your venus, i'm your fire, at your desire!" the look on dustin's face was priceless as he saw will in dustin's usual seat and the two of them singing and dancing to bananarama.

"oh my fucking god," was all he said as he climbed into the back seat.

lucas and mike's reactions were similar. they were mostly just surprised to see will so happy that they didn't care. will was super embarrassed when mike got in the car, but he didn't stop singing. after karaoke renditions of venus, bohemian rhapsody, and i'm so excited, steve pulled up to the high school. he asked will to hang back for a second as the other three boys went in. "listen, bud, i know this time of year sucks for you. and i don't want you to think that i'm pitying you or whatever, i just want you to know that i am here for you, okay? from one fag to another."

will chuckled lightly. "thanks, steve. this means a lot to me." he gave steve a small smile and he clapped him on the shoulder.

"go on, give those kids hell."

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all day, a ghost of a smile never left will's face. it was now lunch, lucas and dustin were talking about recreating ferris bueller's day off. will was sat in between mike and max, slowly eating the ham and cheese sandwich his mother made him this morning. "in this situation, obviously lucas would be cameron and dustin would be ferris, but who would be sloane? me or stacey?" max asked.

"you." dustin and lucas said in unison. lucas looked at dustin. "wait, what?"

"me and stacey called it quits. she's kind of a bitch." dustin shrugged.

"took you that long to figure it out, huh?" mike chimed in.

"nah, i always knew. she's just not the person you dump."

"so, you got dumped?" will asked.

“it was a mutual dumping.”

“you totally got dumped.” lucas said.

“what happened?” max questioned next.

“she wanted to go to a dumb party on halloween and get drunk. not my scene,” he shoved some mashed potatoes the school served into his mouth. “speaking of, what’s our movie plans, boys and lady?”

will’s shoulders tensed. last year, will made it clear that he wasn’t going trick or treating, and that somehow meant no one was trick or treating. so they all agreed to go to will’s and watch a shit load of movies and stuff themselves silly with pizza, popcorn, and all of joyce’s candy. will knows how much they love trick or treating. he felt so guilty they missed out last year. he doesn’t want a repeat of that. “just because i don’t want to go doesn’t mean you guys don’t have to.” will said. he began picking at his sandwich, ripping off the crusts as he spoke.

“don’t be dumb, will. you’re our cleric. the party has gotta stick together.” mike said, smiling at him, and patting his shoulder.

will blushed and felt everyone staring at him. he cleared his throat. “fine, but dress up.”

“yeah, really guys, it’s halloween not a funeral,” dustin offered. “halloween is on a friday. do you think we can have a spooky sleepover at mike’s?”

“why is it always my house?” mike complained.

“because you have an entire basement no one uses.” lucas butted in.

“yeah, man, it’s like our own personal apartment.” dustin said, snapping his fingers.

“except way nerdier.” max said softly.

will smiled. “if that’s okay with mike’s mom then that sounds like a plan. we should all bring movies we wanna watch.”



“i’ll supply the snacks.” dustin said.

“of course you will.” lucas quipped back. they started arguing again, and will’s good day was about to be ruined as troy and james starting walking towards their table.

“guys.” will warned softly, but no one heard him except for mike.

“if it isn’t our favorite homo parade! we got five fags and one dyke. if only the fucking freak were here, then i’m sure the two of you would start making out and then we would have a real party.” troy said, ruffling will’s hair.

“god, you guys are exhausting. can’t you come up with something else?” max said, trying to act unbothered.

troy started mock laughing. “you queers are so weak and pathetic. you need the dykes to fight your battles for you,” none of them said anything. they just wanted to get a rise out of them and they weren’t going to give it to them. “not even a snarky comment from toothless? now that your sorry ass got dumped by stacey you’re back to square one.” troy made his rounds around the table as james just watched and laughed. then he got to will.

“go away, troy. you call us pathetic but you’re the one who needs to take out his daddy issues on us.” mike said, standing up. the chair he was sitting in scraped across the linoleum floor as he did so. the noise caused the whole school to turn their heads and see what the commotion was.

“he speaks! and here i thought you guys were mute, or just pussies. but i guess anything to defend your boyfriend, huh?” mike actually looked pretty intimidating standing next to troy like that. he only had a few inches on him, but that was all he needed to look scary compared to troy.

“two of you, versus six of us. go. away.”

troy only laughed, and then he threw the first punch. it connected with mike’s nose, knocking all six feet of him off his balance and it pushed the table they were sitting at back. lucas and dustin

immediately got to their feet, ready to help mike. max and will got out of their way. mike recovered, touching his nose with his hand. it was guzzling blood. he then quickly charged at troy's stomach, tackling him to the floor. james instantly tried pulling him off, but dustin pushed him away, and was about to pull mike off himself when james threw a punch at him.

"dude, chill!" max yelled, shoving james. lucas then promptly punched him in the face, earning a very dirty look from max. will was just watching in horror as mike got one good punch in, then troy pinned him down again, pulling his arm back for another punch. dustin was trying desperately to pull him off to no avail, it only earned him an elbow to the face. two teachers came running over and broke up the fight, telling troy and james to report to the principal's office. they took one look at the people they were fighting and sent them all to the nurse's. when they were in the hallway, will grabbed mike's arm and dragged him to the nearest bathroom, which was coincidentally right next to the nurse's office.

mike leaned against one of the sinks as will said, "and you call me dumb." he shrugged off his backpack and put it on the sink. he unzipped his bag, searching for the tiny first aid kit, as mike scoffed about will's comment.

pulling it out earned an eyebrow raise from mike. he really only raised them at the ceiling. his head was tilted back to stop the bleeding, but will could tell by the look on the side of his face. "you seriously have a first aid kit?"

will shrugged as he got a gauze bandage wet with water. "you know how my mom is. besides, it's not like i have surgery equipment in here. just gauze and band-aids."

mike now rolled his eyes at the ceiling. "my hero."

will bit his lip as he pulled mike's head down to tend to his wounds. "me or my mom?" his tiny hand was supporting mike's big, dumb head. if will wasn't angry he would be a mess right now.

mike laughed. "definitely your mom." he winced slightly as the bandage touched his nose. most of the blood had dried, but it was

still oozing out of his nostrils.

“i’m surprised he didn’t break your nose. hold that,” will said, grabbing another thing of gauze. “why did you do that?”

“i got sick and tired of troy shitting on us. and i really didn’t wanna hear what he said about—me.” mike closed his eyes.

he noticed the pause and heat ran to his cheeks. thank god mike’s eyes were closed or he would be even more embarrassed and flushed. will knew he was being hopeless but, he really didn’t care. “you didn’t need to get your ass kicked, though.” his nose was definitely going to bruise, his bottom lip was busted and he already had a bruise above his right eyebrow. it could have been worse.

mike smiled. “got him to shut up.”

will hummed in response. “my hero.”

after he was done cleaning him up, mike asked, “hey, do you wanna skip the rest of the day? we can leave a note in dustin’s locker or something so they don’t freak out.”

will nodded eagerly. “yeah, okay.” he put the first aid kit away and rummaged around for a piece of paper and a pen.

mike scribbled in his messy handwriting: *skipped out. don’t wait up! - mike and will*

they found dustin’s locker, slipped it through the cracks, and with that they escaped hawkins high.

### Notes for the Chapter:

im so bad at writing action sequences help  
its 4am im supposed to be up in like 5 hrs but i  
literally could not stop writing this omg  
hope you enjoyed, feedback is always appreciated!  
<3

## 6. six

### Notes for the Chapter:

dialogue heavy but it's a long one :-)

"so where are we going, mike?" will asked, shoving his hands into the pockets of his jacket. it was pretty cold out and the wind was picking up. they were away from the school now, walking through a path in the woods that they knew lead to a clearing.

"um, not sure. i just wanted to get out of there. and spend time with you," heat flooded to both mike and will's cheeks, and it wasn't from the weather. "y'know, to make up for lost time from missed d&d sessions and jane." he clarified.

"oh. right," *great, a pity party*, he thought. to stop his sour-turning mood in its tracks, will decided to make a joke. "and you can't forget the whole getting kidnapped by a demon and then getting possessed by one thing."

mike let out a really funny sounding noise, like he wasn't expecting that at all.

will put a hand over his mouth and started laughing. "what the hell was that sound?" will asked in between gasps of air.

"i wasn't expecting you to say something like that at all! jeez, will." mike said, clutching his stomach as they continued laughing. after calming down a little bit, they kept walking down the trail and they were near the clearing.

"i've missed this." will said, softly, almost hoping mike wouldn't hear.

the other boy nodded. "me too. i love everyone in the party, and they're all my best friends, but..." mike paused, trying to meticulously pick the right words. will's heart was in his throat pumping erratically as he waited for mike to finish his sentence. "you're *will*, you know? you're my *best* best friend."

will smiled in response. “yeah, i know. i feel the same way.”

except he didn't feel exactly the same way. he felt more. he felt love; the cheesy, romantic, head over heels shit he only saw in the soap operas jane watched everyday.

and every time he was reminded that mike didn't, his heart that was so big and so full with friendship, care, and kindness for his friends and family and *love for mike* broke a little bit more.

will could feel the all too familiar feeling of his throat about to close up with emotion. to shake himself out of his thoughts he said, “how about the quarry?”

hesitantly, mike said yes.

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will knew very little about the run in with troy and james at the quarry three years ago, just that jane used her powers and snapped troy's arm in two (dustin's words) and saved mike from falling to his death. he didn't know for certain, but will took a bet that mike didn't want to go on top of the quarry for that exact reason. he didn't go into detail about how he felt when he almost died. will didn't know if he was still scared about falling again, so they went to the bottom part of the quarry instead.

“how'd you know i didn't wanna go up top?” mike asked quietly. they walked over to a large rock that was close to the water. mike scooped up a large pile of rocks in his hands, mostly pebbles, and dumped them on top of the flat surface. mike then climbed up the rock first. he took off his backpack, set it down onto the left of him and sat down cross legged near the edge of the rock. he threw his first rock like a frisbee, trying to skip them across the water as he waiting for will's answer.

“i took a guess. i wouldn't wanna go up there if i were you.” will responded. the other boy nodded and hummed at the answer. he mimed mike's actions and climbed up the rock, kind of struggling since he didn't have the long leg adventure. mike snickered, and will mumbled a benevolent ‘shut up.’ he sat down to mike's right. he hissed at how cold the rock was, and then picked up the pebbles,

offhandedly throwing them into the blue water.

at the thick silence, will could sense that mike was trying to decide if he should ask a question. “what do you dream about at night?”

will inhaled sharply. he didn’t like talking about his nightmares. they’re not dreams. he couldn’t remember the last time he had a good dream. suddenly, he became more focused on throwing the rocks.

“i’m sorry. it’s just that three years have gone by, and i still get fucking nightmares. i think we all do. i know el does. i know you do. hell, even steve does. but we never talk about it. and i get that we’re trying to move on but i just—i want to talk about it. and you don’t have to. but if it gets too much or something just let me know, okay? i just can’t keep—”

“mike. shut up. it’s okay. i can... i can talk, too. you go first, though.”

mike chuckled, then nodded curtly. “i don’t have them often, maybe once every two weeks. three if i’m lucky. but they’re about jumping off that cliff and turning into mush. or troy actually killing dustin up there, and then gutting me. or all of us getting slaughtered by the demogorgon in that classroom.” his voice wavered, and he cleared his throat to hide it as if will didn’t notice it. he dragged his knees up to his chest, locking his fingers together around his legs. when that position wasn’t what he was looking for, he extended his legs and let them hang off the edge of the rock. his hands rested in his knees. mike kicked them out, having the heels of his shoes repeatedly smack the rock.

impulsively, mostly out of annoyance, will grabbed mike’s hand to steady it and his leg, just as mike did to comfort will that dreadful halloween. “huh. deja vu.” mike whispered.

will laughed softly. “go on. please.”

slowly, he continued. “and then there’s another dream, one where we’re back in the tunnels. but you’re there too, along with el and your mom and hopper. jonathan. nancy. my mom and dad,” he wiped under his eye with his free hand. “holly. even mr. clarke. and all of you just get swept up and killed by those tentacle things, the demo-

dogs and the demogorgon and i just have to watch, i can't do anything. i'm powerless. i don't have powers like el. i'm not smart like dustin. i'm not adaptive like lucas, or a leader like max. i'm not strong like you."

"hey, look at me," will said with a serious tone, and mike did, tears falling freely from his eyes. "you are *not* weak. you've dealt with this for years, on your own. you are the leader of the party. you're our paladin. and you're caring, selfless, brave, smart and you're one of the greatest people i know. you're my best best friend, mike."

mike exhaled, letting out a frustrated breath. the heel of his free palm jutted against his eyes, refusing any more stray tears from falling. a tight, sad smile formed on his lips. "thanks, will." he spoke softly, not wanting his voice to fail him again.

will became acutely aware that his hand was still on mike's knee and his hand, and slowly removed it. heat flooded to his cheeks. "i don't have dreams anymore. if i do, i don't remember them. i only have nightmares." he started, his eyes fixating on the ripples of water ahead of them. will could feel mike turn and look at him. he made a mental note to not return his stare; will would probably explode with all the emotions he's feeling. he didn't like being vulnerable.

"they're all about the shadow monster. mind flayer, whatever we call it. but... i'm possessed, usually. and i don't have control, i'm just there, helpless. my vision is foggy, like i'm looking through someone else's eyes. i guess i was. i don't think i ever told you, but i almost killed my mom that night. she tried helping me, and i started choking her," will paused to gain his composure. he hated talking about this, but pouring everything out to mike was cathartic. it felt freeing. mike's eyes were still boring holes into the side of will's head, so he finally turned to face him, breaking his rule. he didn't know what he expected, maybe a disgusted look on mike's face, but instead mike looked genuinely sad for his best friend. his eyes were still a little puffy and red from before, but they were soft and comforting and filled with so much sorrow. "i hate talking about this." will whispered, his gaze falling to mike's chin. it was a weird thing to look at but it was easier than the latter.

"that wasn't you," mike said. "and you know that it wasn't you. none

of it was you.”

will swallowed roughly. “i know, but i just wish i could have done something. for the rest of my life, i will feel guilty. no matter what.”

“but it will get easier. and you will forgive yourself one day, even if i have to be the person to push you to do it.” mike said, a ghost of a smile appearing on his lips at the thought.

will nodded, then exhaled shakily. “sometimes i just wish the demogorgon killed me. so many people died, mike. so many. i know i was just a host and i couldn’t do anything but those soldiers, those doctors, *bob*. ” a sob escaped his lips and he quickly started wiping his tears. mike scooted closer, wrapping an arm around will’s shoulder. he wasn’t exactly hugging him, but the comfort was more than enough.

“i—i’ve only had those dreams once or twice. the one that reoccurs the most is seeing your body, or fake body, i guess, being dragged out of that water,” he pointed in front of them with his free hand, “right there. i just remember that feeling. how awful it was, and how i never want to feel it again.” mike said. he was crying. more tears formed in will’s eyes at the sight.

“what feeling?”

“how it felt to lose you.”

will blinked once, twice. he turned his head, sniffing. mike was already looking at him. red, tear brimmed eyes met his gaze and will exhaled at the sight of him. his cheeks were tear stained and a light shade of pink from the wind, his nose still looking messed up from troy’s fist. mike looked... cute. and suddenly will was overwhelmed with the want to kiss mike. he allowed himself to glance at his lips, which only made him want to lay one on him even more. he quickly looked back up to mike’s eyes, and not missing a beat to avoid weirdness, he simply lay his head onto the other boy’s shoulder. an awkward side hug would do in substitute for a kiss. for now.

mike’s arm was still draped behind him, now resting on his right arm. he rubbed it softly as will nestled his head. they stayed like that for



longer than a normal 'hug,' and before will could talk himself out of it, he wrapped both arms around mike's torso and hugged him properly as tight as he could. "thank you, mike."

mike chuckled, his chest vibrating as he did so. "of course, buddy. for the record, i was serious," will untangled himself, a small frown on his brow as he looked at mike. "i'm going to be spending the rest of your life making this shitty hand you were wrongfully dealt as good as i can make it. so you can't die anytime soon, because i'm looking forward to that. and because it really fucking sucked the first time."

will let out a breathy laugh. "i won't." once again, his cheeks were warm, and this time so was his heart.

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they spent the next god knows how long talking about halloween—like what ridiculous costume dustin was gonna come up with—new music, the possibility of more star wars movies, how he liked having hopper as a 'dad,' what they thought the real reason dustin and stacey broke up was, and countless other things. they moved around so they were sitting cross legged towards each other opposed to looking at the water. mike said his neck hurt from turning to look at will. their knees were touching.

now they were talking about the possibility of getting detention or being grounded by their parents for skipping school and the fight.

"god, when my mom sees my nose she's gonna flip." mike said, shaking his head.

"did i mention that you're an idiot?"

mike rolled his eyes. "yeah, a few times. i think my head's too big to comprehend your message, though."

"in that case, you're an idiot." there were now fully formed bruises on mike's forehead near his hairline and on his nose. will sighed again as he looked at them.

"whatever, it was worth it. even if i got my ass kicked."

"yeah?" will swallowed, narrowing his eyes slightly. "i suppose that's

what you get for defending zombie boy's honor."

mike pursed his lips. "worth it."

will, struggling to keep his cool, let out a laugh. "your secret is safe with me. i don't know why you didn't just say that in the bathroom, though."

mike opened his mouth, but was interrupted by the familiar sound of bike tires on gravel. will and mike shared a worried look. was it troy and james looking for revenge?

but luckily, dustin and lucas came into view on their bikes; jane on the back of dustin's and max on the back of lucas's, skateboard in her hand. will figured she couldn't board on the rocky surface of the quarry. "jesus!" yelled dustin. he and lucas parked their bikes. jane wiped the underneath of her nose. "your lucky they don't have a whole search party looking for your asses."

*oh shit.* "what time is it?" will asked, realization setting in.

"it's five." mike stated, looking down at the watch on his wrist.

"shit," will exhaled. "we weren't at school. i missed my goddamn appointment."

"we left a note!" mike exclaimed, extending his hand as he did so.

"where?" lucas questioned.

"dustin's locker."

"oh. oops. thought that was from stacey. i tossed it as soon as i saw it." dustin stated, rubbing the back of his neck.

"we totally thought you got grabbed by troy and james. we had jane do her..." max trailed off. "thingy to find you guys."

"i channeled them."

"you're not supposed to be using your powers." mike said, a kind of annoyed look on his face.

“emergency.” jane crossed her arms and her eyes went from mike’s eyes, to their knees touching, over to will’s eyes. she had a stern look painted onto her face. will suddenly felt tiny.

“will’s mom is worried sick. you guys should go.” lucas said, picking up on the shift in the air. max and dustin shared a look they thought will didn’t see.

“i’ll walk will home,” mike said, standing up. he brushed the dusty rock residue off of his cargo pants and reached out a hand for will to grab. will took it. “take el home and tell joyce and hopper we’ll be there soon,” he pauses, surveying the area. “please.”

will can visibly see the anger bubble up in jane, but she bites her tongue instead of saying anything. lucas, max, and dustin simply nod and then leave, mounting the bikes and pedaling off. will and mike gathered their bags and set off, too.

it was quiet for a while, except the sounds of their sneakers crushing the autumn leaves below them. they decided to take the train tracks to will’s house as it was quicker. but will’s brain was churning with a question. “why was jane so pissed?”

mike sighed. “we’ve been arguing a lot. ever since i told her i needed space.”

will’s eyebrows popped up. “space?”

“it was my way of... breaking up with her. i read it was nicer to say that.”

will nearly shit his pants. “where did you read that? dumbass magazine?”

mike laughed, earning a toothy grin from will. “the funny part is it was actually from one of nancy’s magazines.”

will stifled a laugh. “oh my god, dude,” mike only shrugged. “what happened between you two? why do you need space, i mean.” he quickly clarified.

mike inhaled deeply. “a lot of reasons. it’s kind of complicated thing

to simply it that easily, you know? i just don't feel that way about her anymore," mike's pace slowed a bit as he chose whether or not to speak any further. "honestly, i don't think i ever did." mike turned to look at him. will avoided eye contact, focusing on not tripping and falling instead.

"you just tricked yourself into thinking you did?" will said softly.

"yeah. exactly. i just wanted to like her," mike smiled fondly. "lucas told me that three years ago and i got so mad. he's always been too smart for his own good."

"you got that right. just don't tell him that." will tried to ignore the speed his heart was currently pounding at. he was sure mike could practically hear his pulse. they took a right at a tree the party carved a bunch of words and drawings into to mark the path that lead to will's house. it was max's idea; they did it to every tree that lead to a party member's house or other place in hawkins. after reaching the clearing the lead to will's house, will grabbed mike's arm to stop him.

"hey, i just wanted to say thank you for everything you did today. i don't even talk about that shit with my actual therapist. i let out a lot of stuff i've built up over the years and i just... i really, really needed that. thank you." his hand was still on mike's arm and after giving it a light squeeze, he let go.

mike smiled widely, showing almost all of his teeth. "of course, will. thank you for doing what you do best and making me feel less crazy."

"crazy together." will said, smiling back. they started walking again and were soon outside of will's house. the sun was already starting to set. lucas's bike was parked by the porch, he was probably going to give mike a ride home, thank god. will slowly inhaled through his mouth, preparing himself. "wish me luck." he whispered to mike.

"good fucking luck." with that, his front door squeaked open as will turned the knob, and his mom was at her usual spot at the kitchen table, chain smoking her cigarettes nervously. will really needed to get her to quit. hopper was standing next to her, hands on his hips still in his chief uniform. he was cooking dinner, too. jane was on the couch with lucas. at the sight of mike and will, joyce took one final

drag from her cigarette and stubbed it out angrily.

“will?” was all she said and will knew he was fucked. joyce rarely got angry, he couldn’t imagine what hopper was going to do to him. “where were you?”

“we were at satler’s quarry.” will answered. he shrugged off his bag and coat, hanging his coat up and setting his bag by the couch. he walked over and sat at the table across from his mom. mike remained at the door, unsure what to do.

joyce nodded curtly. “okay. mike, i called your mother. she knows where you are. lucas, again, thank you for finding them and offering to take mike home.” joyce folded her hands in front of her. hopper exhaled and turned around to stir whatever was cooking in the pan on the stove.

“yeah, of course. bye jane, bye will. have a good night, mr. and mrs. hopper.” lucas stood and zipped his jacket up, waving slightly.

“you too, lucas.” hopper said over his shoulder. joyce smiled at him again.

“i just want to say that it was my idea to skip, not will’s. and i started the fight at school. that’s all. i’m sorry for worrying you.” mike stated, glancing at will as he did so.

joyce’s expression softened and she nodded. “thank you for telling me the truth, mike. you’re a good friend to will.”

the ends of his mouth formed into a small smile. “have a good night, everyone. bye jane. i’ll, uh, see you at school tomorrow, will.” he waved, and left the house with lucas, closing the door behind him.

“jane, honey, can you go to your room? we’ll call you when dinner is ready.” joyce asked, focusing her gaze onto will now. jane mumbled an ‘okay’ and left. after her door closed, hopper sat down at the table, too.

“well, kid? what the hell happened today?” he asked, crossing his arms as he leaned back slightly.

"i'm really sorry." will said.

"what were you thinking? will, this is so unlike you!"

"i wasn't thinking, mom, i just... did a dumb thing and i completely forgot about my appointment with doctor owens and i'm sorry." he deflated in his seat.

"you forgot?" hopper asked. he said asked in a way that made will shrink in his seat even more.

"yes, time got away from us and it was the last thing on my mind."

"you've been going to these appointments every wednesday at 3:30 for the last two years and you *forgot?* "

"yes! i just wanted to feel normal for once, okay? and i did! and it was amazing. i am sorry for worrying you and skipping school and my appointment but i'm not sorry for my reasoning."

joyce's face fell and she immediately looked sad and guilty. "oh, will, honey, i—"

"no. i want you to treat me normally. please. just whenever i get in trouble or don't do the dishes or anything, don't treat me as if i'll break if you yell at me. and punish me now how you would treat jonathan if he skipped school and was kind of in a fight." will pleaded.

joyce and hopper shared a small look. "you're asking to be punished?" hopper clarified. will nodded hesitantly. "well. you're officially the weirdest kid i know." a smile was on his lips as he said that, and he stood up to continue making dinner.

"alright then. no going to mike's this weekend for your campaign, and..." joyce trailed off, thinking. "hop? any suggestions?"

"he did say something about dishes." he offered.

"and dishes for a week." she finished.

"deal," will nodded heavily. "i'm all good for halloween next week,

right?”

joyce chuckled. “yes, will. as long as it’s okay with karen, then yes.”

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after dinner, will decided to call mike. he prayed that he wasn’t grounded from the phone, too. last year for christmas, jonathan got him a telephone for his room. it sat on his desk along with his watercolors and sketchbook and homework. he dragged it as far as the cord would let him and sat on his bed.

he dialed mike’s number and on the second ring, karen wheeler picked up the phone. “hello?”

“hi, mrs. wheeler? can i talk to mike?” will imagined karen wheeler rolling her eyes, nursing a glass of red wine in her hand.

“MIKE! PHONE!”

“OKAY!”

will had to stifle his laughter.

“he’ll be right with you.”

“okay, thanks.”

“I GOT IT!” pause. the sound of the receiver being picked up. “hello?”

a soft click indicated karen hung up. “hi.”

“will, hi. still have phone privileges, huh? or is this like prison and this is your one phone call?”

will smiled. “nah, i still have phone privileges. i can’t make d&d this weekend, though. and i’m stuck with doing every single dish that lands in the sink.”

mike hummed. “my dad congratulated me on getting into my first fight. he said hopefully i’d win next time.”

will bit his lip. "that's kind of shitty."

"yeah."

there was silence that lasted a beat too long. "thank you for saying that before you left. it helped a lot actually; made my mom a lot less mad at me. and everything that happened today weirdly gave me the confidence to tell them to stop babying me."

mike chuckled. will could picture the genuine smile that was probably plastered on his face. "that's good, will. didn't wanna say anything earlier but a first aid kit? a bit much. even for joyce."

will let out a loud laugh. "god, that was awful, huh?"

mike started laughing, too. "yes, will, it was awful."

"speaking of, how are your war wounds?"

"they hurt. my nose feels like it's about to fall off," a wince rang through the receiver. "still worth it."

will ignored the blush creeping onto his cheeks and neck. "did you just touch it even though you know it hurts?"

"maybe."

they talked for an hour before joyce came in at 9:30 and told will it was time to hang up and go to bed. unbeknownst to will, she was outside his door with hopper twenty minutes ago. "he's laughing, hop. last year he wouldn't leave his room for days."

they walked down the hall not wanting to eavesdrop and into their bedroom. "i know, joyce. it's..." hopper trailed off with a sigh. "it's a miracle. do you think—"

"it's mike? yeah. i do."

after hanging up, will didn't have any nightmares while he slept. in fact, he had a good dream for the first time in two years.

it was about mike.



## **Notes for the Chapter:**

feedback is always appreciated! hope you enjoyed  
<3